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ABSTRACT

Problems attributed to dual language learning in early childhood have been exaggerated and may be the result of a failure to control significant research variables. The relationship between a child's acquisition of a language and his ability to think must be better understood for closer investigation of the effects of dual language learning. Several conditions do appear to be conducive to promoting dual language acquisition. It seems that the two languages should be kept in separate contexts so that coordinated language systems might develop. The best language models must be available in both languages. A rich and varied background of environmental encounters is important as are acceptance of the child's uniqueness, respect for his native language, appreciation of his cultural heritage, and attention to his specific language requirements. Curriculum design for early childhood bilingual education should take these conditions into account and encourage improved oral language ability and introductory literacy skills in the native language, intensive oral language development and readiness for literacy in the second language, and access to knowledge in the stronger language. (VM)

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# THE DUAL LANGUAGE PROCESS IN YOUNG CHILDREN

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The outstanding intellectual achievement of any child is his acquisition of language. When a child acquires two languages and uses them effectively in controlling the world around him, his accomplishment is a remarkable triumph in human learning. The young child who lives and grows in the midst of dual language opportunities may enjoy great benefits of mental flexibility or may suffer great burdens of mental confusion. Whether his early exposure to languages other than his mother tongue becomes an asset or a liability is dependent upon a number of highly complex variables. Among these are genetic endowment, parental education, economic status, cultural group, social class and life opportunities. In addition to these influences, both internal and external, there are other factors--the age at which the second language learning begins, the degree of proficiency in the first language, the quality of the language experiences, the relative political positions of both languages and the acceptance afforded the speaker in each cultural milieu.

## The Child's First Language

In the natural course of his total development, the normal child acquires his first language, the system of sounds which accompanies his experience. As the child encounters his physical and psychological world, he takes in information. He receives sensory data, images, symbols and sounds. He sorts a vast amount

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of undifferentiated stimuli and begins to attach meanings to them as he becomes increasingly aware of objects, people and events in his environment. These are his personal realities which he encodes in sounds imitative of those who care for him. He soon discovers the wonder and the power of words. He understands what others are saying to him and can act or choose not to act in response. Others understand him and can respond in return. There are now perceptual constants and conceptual certainties to be shared by means of a mutually-understood symbol system. He perceives, listens, talks, smiles, feels good about himself and about others. His own world is a fairly steady, reliable place. The specific symbols used to describe and to explain it are reasonably dependable and unchanging. Real and symbolic boundaries expand consistently with enriched experiences and improved language. Mastery in first language learnings is commensurate with the child's inner potential and the diverse conditions outside him.

The Child's Second Language

The young child may begin his second language at precisely the same moment when first language growth gets under way. If parents, grandparents, household members, or others responsible for his infant care use a second language, then, he learns to listen, to speak and to attach meanings to sound systems of more than one speech community. When both languages are available from the start, the child may become very proficient

in one language, partially competent in the second, equally poor in both, or any other combination of possibilities ranging across the many dimensions of sounds, structures, vocabulary and semantics of both languages. The variations are endless and unique to the individual child. Should the child have a good start on his first language prior to his second language exposure, there are some previous learnings which he may bring to his new language task. He already has a background of experiences, sensations, percepts, images, concepts, sounds and symbols. He possesses a storehouse of information about language, what it is made of and how it works. He has imitated and internalized the symbol system of his first language. The extent to which he has done this is dependent upon the depth and breadth of his initial language acquisition. He now has to learn to attach new sounds and/or different combinations of them to the reservoir of knowledge he has presently stored. He may also have to undergo new experiences, specific to the cultural environment in which the new speech community exists. It is necessary for him to listen to the second language, to understand which sounds stand for which reality he already has encountered, to meet new, unfamiliar realities, to remember the order of sound combinations, to imitate accurately the available speech models and finally, to speak fluently. The degree of success which he enjoys in the dual language learning process is determined by the strength of his first language, the existence of interference, the number and kind of experiences, the accompanying feelings and expectancies

and countless other forces which shape human speech. It is difficult to state whether he is to be blessed with a second-language accomplishment or burdened with a second-language handicap. Like matrimony, it may be for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer but it may be hazardous to predict the outcome at best unless the concomitant conditions are known.

Two Languages - Burden or Benefit?

The literature is replete with studies which report the destructive effects of dual language learning on speech production, concept acquisition, vocabulary growth, intellectual power, social adjustment and personality development. Negative impact on speech includes errors in articulation, voice distortion, faulty rhythm and inappropriate stress. Inhibition of language maturity is seen in fewer words, shorter sentences, confused word order, grammatical errors and poor idiomatic expression. Slowness in intellectual growth is related to the imprecise use of two languages inadequately developed to serve as instruments of thought. Educational retardation begins early when written language tasks of reading, spelling and handwriting are insufficiently supported by a broad base of oral language abilities. Access to the fields of knowledge by way of the weaker language results in limited achievement. Personality disorders and character disturbances reportedly accrue from the tension and stresses attendant upon straddling two different cultures, seeing the world from two different points of view and using two

different symbol systems to express them. There is certainly no shortage of ordinary perils during the period of childhood. From these gloomy prophecies of the many deleterious consequences, the weight of dual language learning is seen as overwhelming.

There have been raised, however, the dissenting voices of theorists who state emphatically that the problems attributed to dual language learnings in early childhood have been grossly exaggerated. This more positive view insists that the failure to control significant research variables has led investigators to overstate the severity of speech difficulties, to describe inaccurately language developmental delays, to distort unrealistically intellectual limitations, to emphasize unduly educational retardation and to magnify without adequate documentation personality disintegration or character disorders. Many scholars claim advantages of dual language learning both for the individual and for the society in which he lives. Jensen has provided an excellent research summary of the effects, both good and bad, of childhood bilingualism.[2] Because increasing contact among different nations and diverse individuals is greater than ever before in Man's history, adequate communication skills have become prerequisites for survival. It is imperative to examine all the possibilities, good and bad, and to draw conclusions based on more careful research.

## Dual Language Learning and Thought

The relationship between a child's acquisition of language and his ability to think is not very clearly understood. Three major positions are to be found among the scholars. Language

and thought are identified as the same entity; they are said to be separate entities, or they are considered as somewhat loosely related entities. It is very difficult to observe what happens when children are engaged in thinking and it is almost impossible to arrive at a universally acceptable definition of thought. Among the several raw materials of thought, however, are symbols, both verbal and non-verbal. Thinking then, may rely totally upon the quantity and quality of verbal symbols; may depend partially upon these language proficiencies; or may not require specific verbal abilities at all, depending upon the theory of language-thought relationships espoused. If and when children use verbal symbols as an accompaniment of thought, this inner language[5] is usually the mother tongue. It is reasonable to assume that the more precise the language used, the clearer the thinking results, when other conditions remain the same. Language carries content--ideas, generalizations and relationships concerning the child's reality. When the child's experiences and encounters with the environment are clarified, stored and available for retrieval in careful precise terms, it would appear that he would have an incisive instrument to use as his intellectual power in reasoning, judging, remembering and understanding unfolds. There is great need to explore further the language-thought relationship and to consider the effect of dual language learning on the cognitive processes. Central to this question is a consideration of refining the mother tongue even when it is not the dominant language of the community. If there

is found a valid need for inner language for purely personal purposes in reflecting, musing and thinking, then, the social purpose of using expressive language in communicating must not be the only emphasis in language learning.

The Best of Both Languages

Fishman has stated that more than half of the world today uses more than one language while engaging in the activities basic to human needs.[1] With rapid technological advances in transportation and communication, this proportion of bilingual endeavors is bound to increase. It is important to consider thoughtfully the education of those children who are presently living and growing in dual language settings. The language variables must be arranged to create a maximum of benefits and a minimum of burdens. There appear to be several known conditions conducive to promoting success and preventing failure for children engaged in the acquisition of two or more languages. It would seem that parents and/or teachers should keep the languages growing in separate contexts so that coordinate language systems may result. Coordinate systems appear less subject to interference and confusion.[3] It is vital to have the best language models available in both languages as children will readily imitate errors in phonology, intonation and structure. As language, one or several, grows out of experience, it is essential to provide children with a rich and varied background of environmental encounters so that sensory impressions, images,

percepts and concepts may be tested, verified and encoded in language. The press for early school achievement in the weaker language should be avoided. Since the school world, even on the primary levels, demands an extraordinary proficiency in receptive and expressive use of verbal symbols, every effort must be exerted to insure that the child's language competency is commensurate with the school's expectations. When the language of the home is not that of the school nor of the majority culture, extra care must be taken to engender feelings of acceptance and equality. A child's first language learnings take place in the warmth and intimacy of his family. These learnings carry with them memories and emotions which are part of himself. When his language is valued, he feels himself and all that is a part of him valued as well. Excessive demands for control of the conventions of the writing systems in either the native language or the second one should not be made. Reading and writing skills require responses to a set of visual symbols superimposed upon auditory symbols. It is logical to expect that the normal child will read and write first the language which he controls well in its oral form. The implications of arranging a program of dual language learning which provides for an appropriate sequence of skill development are self-evident. Though many of the social, economic and political variables affecting the outcomes of the dual language learning process are outside the sphere of influence of educators, such factors as acceptance of the child's uniqueness, respect for his native language,

appreciation of his cultural heritage and attention to his specific language requirements will contribute greatly to his successful acquisition of two or more languages. The world needs speakers of many languages to share new ideas, to exchange technological knowledge, to preserve history and to talk together for peace in the universe. Wherever the dual language talents of young children are found, they must be nurtured and preserved.

## Dual Languages In A Curriculum for Young Children

A curriculum which would deliver the valuable benefits of dual language learning while, at the same time remove its heavy burdens, is presently the subject of considerable discussion in educational circles of the United States. With greater concern for the rights of minority ethnic groups and with improved resources for the creation of special programs, a number of vastly different plans have been implemented. Though highly diverse in ultimate goals, classroom organization, staffing patterns and teaching strategies, these curricula share the common title of bilingual education. The description which follows gives the basic framework for one approach to the education of young children who are currently using or who are actively learning two languages. There are six major strands which support activities designed to remove the major stumbling blocks to successful learning. The six primary areas are these: (1) expanded experiences with the environment; (2) improved oral language ability in the vernacular; (3) introductory literacy skills in the native language; (4) intensive

oral language development in the second language; (5) readiness for literacy in the second language; (6) access to the fields of knowledge by way of the stronger language and through the best language modality.

In schools of the United States, the uniqueness of an early childhood curriculum in which two languages serve as media of instruction lies in the opportunity to develop truly bilingual pupils during the period of optimum language learning. For the child who is not native to English, there is provision for expansion and refinement of the vernacular across all language bands of listening comprehension, speaking fluency, reading and writing. For the child who is a native speaker of English, there is an introduction to a second language according to a carefully ordered plan which will lead him to full competence in these same bands of language. Essential to any successful educational plan is the emphasis upon a deep awareness of the environment in which the pupil is living and growing. His understanding of his immediate world as well as the larger society to which he contributes must come from broad experiences at all levels. Such experiences should be first hand when feasible and practical or may be offered vicariously through pictures, films, slides, records, tapes, television and other media. Each experience should be accompanied by language which enables him to label, to classify and to store the experience for later retrieval. It seems reasonable to expect that the child's stronger language would serve as the mediator when new experiences are

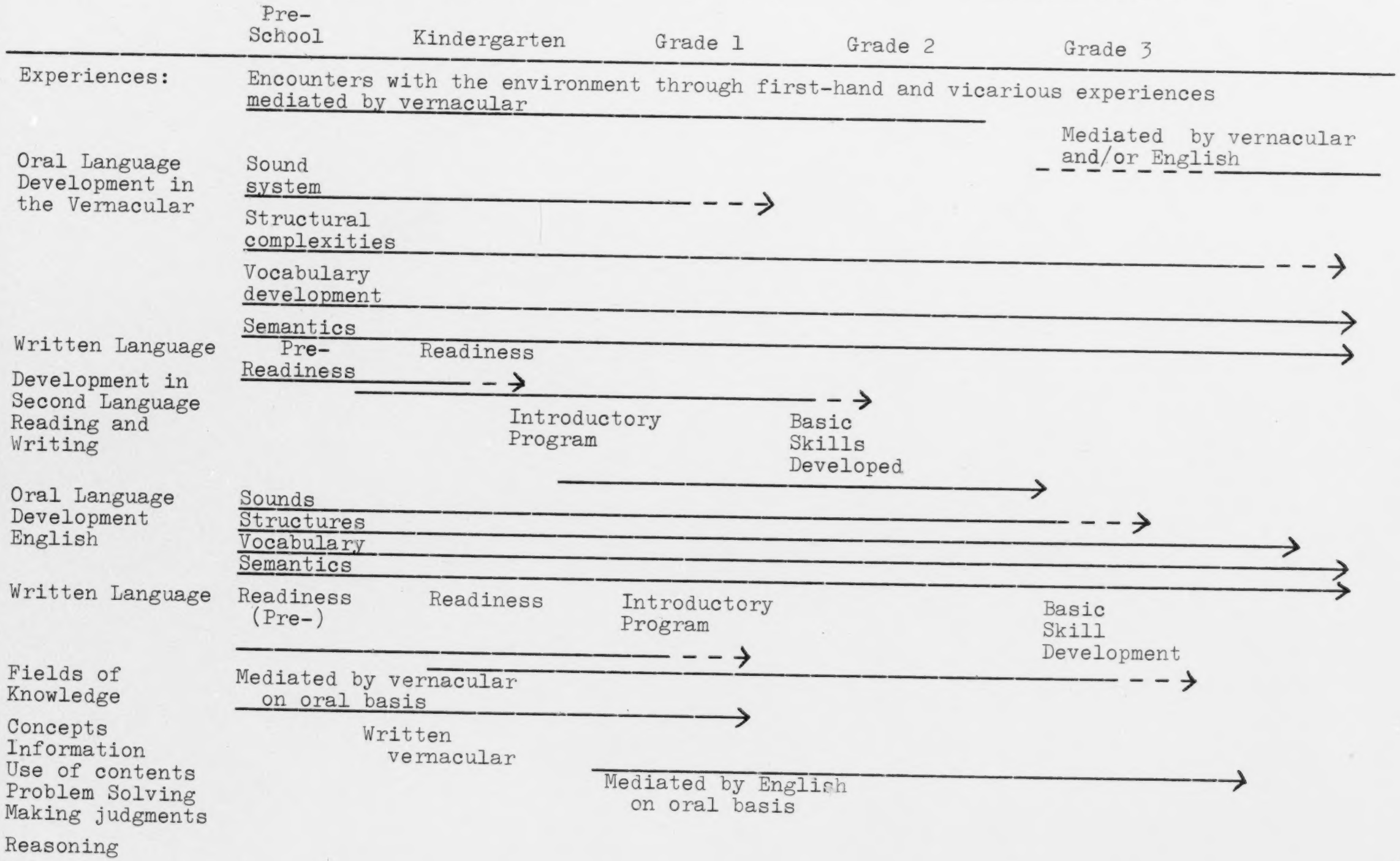
presented, especially when an experience is totally new and serves as a basis for concept acquisition. It is important to distinguish between the learning of the new language label for a known concept, already understood, stored and encoded in another language and the acquisition of a totally new concept derived from a never-before-encountered experience.

The defeating press for written material must be avoided by arranging each language activity according to the developmental stage and educational background of individual learners. Formal literacy programs in either the vernacular or in the second language must be structured and supported by a broad base of oral language. Print stands for speech; print is secondary to speech; and print must be transformed into the language system which the child controls in its oral form. The dual language curriculum must also take into account the difference between language as a study in itself and language as a carrier of content in the fields of knowledge. It is most unjust to anticipate that a child will master a new language--its phonology, structure, vocabulary and semantics--in both oral and written form at the same time as he is acquiring the body of knowledge carried by that language.

Pupils should be introduced to basic understandings in mathematics, science, social science, health and safety through the medium of the stronger language. Pre-literate and functionally illiterate pupils should be provided with pictures, demonstrations, films and oral explanations which are comprehensible to them. Textbooks, workbooks, study sheets and other written materials which cannot

be read and understood should be avoided until literacy skills are well established. The curriculum plan must provide for differential lnaguage proficiencies not only in the dual languages but also among the many dimensions of listening, speaking, reading and writing. At each grade level in each subject area and for each learner the expected performances must be consistent with the enormous complexities of children developing dual languages. Pupils who enter the educational program at any point should be placed where they are most comfortable socially and chronologically. Prior learnings must be assessed and appropriate skills must be introduced for reinforcement and for mastery. An expectancy of excellence of performance does not need to be changed or lowered. Children learning by way of two languages do not require a dilution of the curriculum or a set of different educational goals. They need the same quality educational program as their monolingual peers in a single language curriculum. They do need time, proper sequence of subject matter, appropriate teaching strategies and careful appraisal of progress as they grow toward this standard of excellence. Children who are learning two languages as well as using two languages in order to learn are engaged in a highly complex process, one which influences their cognitive power, their emotional development and their personality structure. The challenge to educators of young children lies in the preparation of an educational plan which will guide them safely through the dual language process so that they are competent, knowledgeable and comfortable in two environments and in two languages.

BILINGUAL EDUCATION OF CHILDREN, AGES THREE TO EIGHT YEARS
CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK AND TIME LINE - FOR THE NON-ENGLISH-SPEAKING PUPIL

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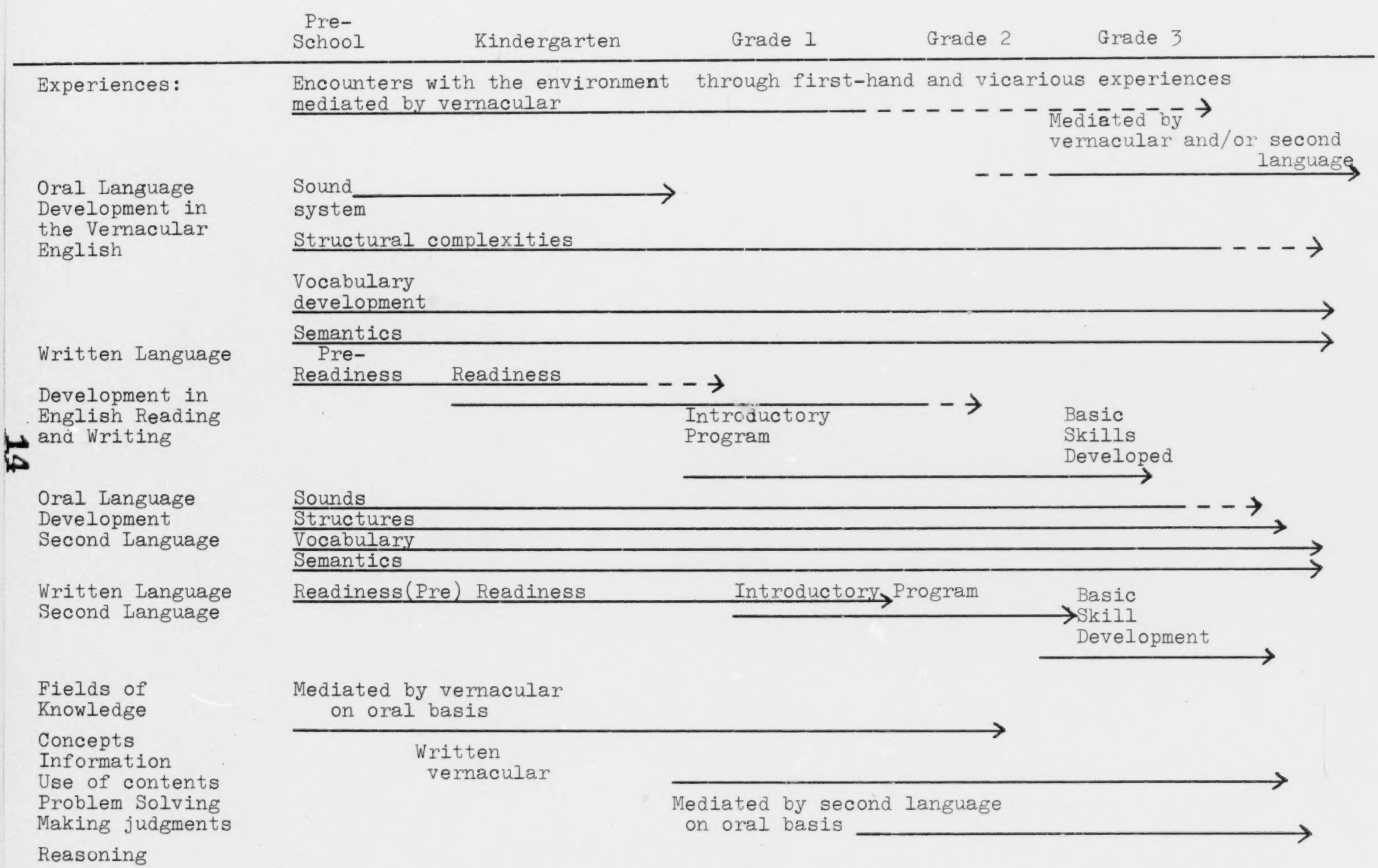
CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK AND TIME LINE - FOR THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING PUPIL

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